

Report to General Assembly

The Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Children

The Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Children was created in statute during the 2011 Missouri legislative session and was charged with studying and identifying strategies for preventing child sexual abuse. This Task Force provided the Governor, Missouri General Assembly and the State Board of Education with 22 recommendations within the broad categories of community-based child sexual abuse and prevention, professional training and technical assistance, multidisciplinary team excellence, mental health services and treatment, awareness, funding, and statutory changes. Areas for further study were also identified.

The Task Force was reauthorized during the 2018 legislative session to continue to study the issue of sexual abuse of children (Section 210.1200, RSMo). Prior to being reauthorized, committed experts were meeting as an Interim Task Force to further this work until members were officially appointed. They focused on four specific recommendations identified in the 2012 report:

1. Standardized training for mandated reporters
2. Best practices and standards for multidisciplinary teams (MDT), law enforcement, prosecutors and medical providers
3. Youth with illegal or inappropriate sexual behaviors
4. Mental health services for sexually abused children

The members of the current Task Force met on a voluntary basis to continue addressing the prevention of sexual abuse of children, adding some new recommended areas of focus.

Data from their most recent annual report indicates that the Children's Division received more than 68,000 reported incidents that involved over 98,000 children in Missouri. Children's Division service workers determined there was reasonable cause that abuse/neglect occurred toward 5,141 Missouri children. Of those 5,141 victims of abuse and neglect, 1,261 children suffered from sexual abuse. Sexual abuse now ranks second in substantiated children by category. There is a critical need in Missouri to address this problem and to support child victims and their families.

Data from the previous year show a small increase in the number of sexual abuse cases in Missouri. The following table is from the Children's Division Child Abuse and Neglect 2017 Annual Report, as data from 2018 are not yet available. The table summarizes the frequency and type of abuse and neglect substantiated during the reporting period January 1 through December 31, 2017:

Substantiated Children by Category of Abuse/Neglect, 2017*

Number		Percent
Neglect	2,786	54.2%
Sexual Abuse	1,261	24.5%
Physical Abuse	1,094	21.3%
Emotional Abuse	277	5.4%
Medical Neglect	136	2.6%
Educational Neglect	67	1.3%

The percent column represents the percentage of 5,141 total substantiated children. Percent total is greater than 100 because a child may be substantiated for up to six categories of abuse/neglect.

Fondling or touching was the most frequent worker finding for sexually abused children. The 10 most often reported worker findings for sexually abused children are shown below:

Worker Findings for Sexually Abused Children during FY 2017*

Number		Percent
Fondling/Touching	767	60.8%
Other Sexual Abuse	547	43.4%
Oral Sex, Sodomy	256	20.3%
Intercourse	251	19.9%
Digital Penetration	176	14.0%
Pornography	65	5.2%
Inappropriately Giving Drugs	29	2.3%
Blaming, Verbal Abuse, Threatening	28	2.2%
Lack of Supervision	19	1.5%
Other Physical Abuse or Injury	13	1.0%

The percent column is the percentage of 1,261 substantiated sexually abused children. Percent total is greater than 100 because multiple findings may be found for a child.

*Missouri Children's Division. Child Abuse and Neglect Fiscal Year 2017 Annual Report. (2018)

2018 Update

The Task Force at large met once during 2018. The meeting focused on the work of subcommittees assigned to each priority area, legislative strategies and updates on issues, and research within the scope of work for the Task Force.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) was a member of the primary prevention subgroup. This subgroup met three times face-to-face and twice by conference call during 2018. A large portion of the subgroup's work this year was developing a needs assessment of sexual abuse prevention programming at the state and national level. DESE collaborated on the state needs assessment of sexual abuse prevention programming specifically regarding what is being offered to schools.

Discussion revolved around what the needs assessment would look like and how to develop the instrument. The needs assessment would focus on areas including but not limited to funding for programs, community vs. school-based program delivery, prevention education, and services for victims. DESE would help facilitate the reach of the survey with administrators, school counselors, and teacher groups. The group decided the proposed needs assessment would be disseminated beginning in December 2018.